DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 074 644 95 EA 005 111

AUTHOR	Rubin, Louis J.
TITLE	A Primer on Dissemination.
INSTITUTION	Communications Coalition for Educational Change, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY	National Center for Educational Communication (DHEW/OE), Washington, D.C.
BUREAU NO	20399
PUB DATE	Mar 73
GRANT	OEG-0-72-4334
NOTE	15p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrator Guides; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Community; Educational Change; *Information Dissemination; *Public Relations; Public Schools; *School Community Relationship

ABSTRACT

This document is a guide to educators to help them in preparing and disseminating communications to their communities about the needs of their schools. The guide consists of 50 generalizations about communication methods that were derived from experimentation with a number of theoretical and applied dissemination methods. Related documents are ED 070 188 and EA 005 105-110. (Author/DN)

FILMED FROM BEST AVAILABLE COPY

ED 074644

SCOPE OF INTEREST NOTICE
The ERIC Facility has assigned this document for processing to: EA 5d
In our judgement, this document is also of interest to the clearinghouses noted to the right. Indexing should reflect their special points of view.

Project No. RO 20399

Grant No. OEG-0-72-4334

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

A Primer on Dissemination

Louis J. Rubin

Communications Coalition
for Educational Change

March 1973

EA 005 111

A Primer on Dissemination

Introductory Note: The Communications Coalition for Educational Change, during the course of its activities, experimented with a number of theoretical and applied dissemination methods. The generalizations below were derived from these experimentations. They have been set forth here, in the form of an abbreviated primer, because they may be of interest to educational workers in dissemination activities.

1. *Successful communication, at least for the purposes of educational improvement, is communication that evokes sufficiently sustained action to implement beneficial change.*

2. *It is misleading to think of an educational public; in actuality, there are a large number of different audiences.*

3. *Dissemination failure often stems from the profession's apparent inability to distinguish between public relations and authentic diffusion of new ideas.*

4. *For maximum effectiveness, methods of dissemination should vary in accordance with the particular audience to be reached and the particular ideas to be presented.*

5. As a general rule, it is infinitely more practical to make use of existing communications systems in disseminating information than to create new ones.

6. It is exceedingly difficult to transmit information to a disinterested audience; the relevance of the message, therefore, is crucial.

7. Where dissemination is at stake, providing useful information is a necessary but insufficient condition; since audience attention is always voluntary, it is more essential to bait audience interest in whatever way possible.

8. Information in and of itself may not encourage people to make enlightened decisions about the ways in which they will and will not act.

9. Dissemination is most likely to influence the attitudes and opinions of the target audience when it is open-minded about the issue. When, however, the target audience already has formulated definite attitudes and opinions, the impact of the dissemination is markedly reduced.

10. Before people reach a relatively firm opinion on an issue, they resent communications that are obviously biased or slanted. After they have formed a set of attitudes, however, they tend to prefer communications which reinforce their beliefs.

11. Receptivity to disseminated information is highest when the information is presented in an easily understood form.

12. The way in which people perceive and interpret and respond to a communicated message is influenced by their motives, experiences, and the degree of their interest in the subject. Accordingly, the design and transmittal of messages (encoding) must take these factors into account.

13. People tend to interpret disseminated messages in accordance with their felt needs and goals.

14. The effect of a message is partially determined by its quantity and intensity, but people also avoid, question, reject, or accept a message for reasons that are not yet fully understood.

15. Although the average household spends more time watching TV and listening to the radio than reading the newspaper, newspapers are the favorite source of school information for most adults. Word-of-mouth ranks second followed by radio and television.

16. In general, newspapers are not a reliable source of information about schools: First, newspapers tend to deal only with selected educational issues, and second, they deal with issues in fragmentary ways.

17. Perhaps because of the correlation between poverty and literacy, the very poor tend to rely upon radio and television for their educational news.

18. The overall communication process (encoding-transmitting-interpreting information) has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions. Access to new facts and concepts does encourage people to acquire further insights. Well-informed people generally have more insight, capability, and opportunity than people who are poorly informed. However, the qualitative emotional processes by which people avoid, seek, and utilize information to justify their behavior are integral elements of a well-planned communications campaign.

19. On the whole, most people seek information which confirms their existing state of mind, rather than information which creates the need to change.

20. One-way and two-way communication are both useful, but they serve different functions. One-way communication serves to inform; two-way communication serves to clarify and to enhance understanding.

21. In view of school improvement aims, chiefly those of perpetuating desirable educational change through better communications, two-way communication activities offer a considerable advantage.

22. The possibility that a receiver will interpret a message differently than the sender intended is always large. If the receiver has no opportunity to comment or ask questions, there is no way of knowing how he interpreted the message. Hence, there are no clues regarding the necessary re-coding in order to clarify meaning. For these reasons, two-way communications is frequently more effective than one-way. The more interaction evoked, the greater the opportunity for both sender and receiver to clear-up misinterpretations and to improve mutual understanding.

23. All of education's different publics are regularly exposed to thousands of messages which frequently conflict with one another. The human need to cope with and process this overabundance of information causes people to set up "interference devices." Although they make the information stock-pile manageable, these interference devices cause them to overlook, ignore, and distort useful information. It is therefore imperative for dissemination agencies to learn more about the function of such interference mechanisms, and to take them into account in the planning of communications activities.

24. The probability that a communication message, whether transmitted through print, radio, television, or film, will be misinterpreted, or that the purposes of the sender will be viewed with suspicion, are always good. Moreover, it seems likely that the same message must, for maximum communication effect, be encoded in different ways for different audiences. Consequently, a continuing analysis of the effectiveness of communications activities is essential to dissemination improvement.

25. Information can be disseminated through many media; conversations, speeches, group discussions,

personal letters, phone calls, films, slides, tapes, brochures, journal articles, press, radio and television. The appropriateness of a particular medium depends upon the nature of the audience and the nature of the message. In general, however, personal conversation and participation in group discussion are most likely to produce opinion change and/or evoke the desired behavioral change.

26. Most people do not respond to the information conveyed through the mass media in isolation from other sources of information. Media messages which seem to be important or consequential are discussed in informal conversation with friends, family, and professional associates. This "checking out" process usually occurs over a considerable time span, involving days, weeks, and even years. In this way, initial interests are either reinforced, diluted, or eradicated. Many initial responses, for example, are forgotten within minutes.

27. Some communication messages activate curiosity. Others focus attention on a perceived need or a possible benefit. The former evokes slight, if any, purposeful action. The latter, in contrast, can generate large amounts of sustained behavioral change.

28. To get attention, allow interest, and evoke favorable response, a disseminated message must offer a reward that a receiver perceives to be of benefit. Dissemination messages that give promise of reaching a need and providing tangible benefit are most likely to get attention and sustained response.

29. Communication that generates active participation in a group endeavor is particularly effective because such involvement gives the receivers a sense of identification with a common enterprise. It also tends to suggest that useful change is feasible and within grasp. Thus, the individual desire to act is reinforced.

30. Person-to-person contact is widely regarded as an essential step in most opinion change.

31. True communication requires that there be an authentic dialogue permitting both sender and receiver to give and receive viewpoints.

32. People best understand a disseminated message when they have had firsthand experience with its ideas.

33. People tend to adopt opinions which correspond with those of their associates. They tend to join groups that espouse goals and methods with which they agree.

34. The credibility of the sender is crucial. Put another way, the source of the message is a critical factor in determining (a) whether or not the message is received at all, and (b) the degree of action the message is likely to provoke.

35. The use of opinion leaders to communicate new ideas offers powerful secondary benefits.

36. Status leaders can play two critical roles in dissemination: First, they can greatly increase the likelihood that the message will have reasonable dispersion, and second, they imbue the message with credibility. Effective dissemination programs, consequently, should be concerned with constructive use of such "persuaders". Since the attitudes and beliefs of people are heavily influenced by the groups to which they belong, it is disadvantageous to ignore the leaders of these groups in the dissemination process.

37. Normally, status leaders seek four particular

kinds of information. They look for ideas which:

(a) collaborate their own point of view,

(b) strengthen rather than weaken the position of their group,

(c) serve to enhance their own position with their group,

(d) relate closely with the prominant concerns of their followers.

38. It is probably safe to generalize that no school system--because of political and economical realities--will introduce an improvement on the basis of its virtue alone. The cost may be prohibitive, the change may set in motion other undesirable consequences, the lack of public understanding may create insurmountable opposition, etc. As an operating principle, then, it may be said that communication is an important but partial requirement for change.

39. On the basis of some research evidence, it is reasonable to conjecture that existing communications systems seem to do a reasonably effective job of familiarizing school personnel with available new programs; disinterest is a greater impediment to the utilization of scientific knowledge than lack of awareness.

40. Legislators have special communications preferences in regard to education. They prefer that messages be sharply worded, brief, and to the point. On the other hand, they also insist that an abundance of supporting material be available, particularly when the subject-matter is controversial.

41. Aimless or ill-conceived dissemination not only fails to achieve its desired effect, but may also create resistance which greatly increases disinterest in subsequent dissemination.

42. Discontent and controversy are useful points of departure in planning communications activities. A discontented audience is more prone to action than a complacent one. When a message sponsors informed debate, allowing people to express their convictions, a deepr understanding of the underlying issues is prompted. However, when controversy and discontent are played upon needlessly, without soliciting thoughtful analysis and focusing upon desirable change, they may create a negative and divisive force.

43. In communications campaigns aimed at constructive educational change, it is helpful to organize follow-up

activities, within the target audience, which necessitate group discussion of message content. These follow-up activities help the communicator to become more sensitive to people's reactions, to become aware of misconceptions and misinterpretations, and to sense inherent dissatisfactions with the message. These insights are helpful in improving subsequent communications activities.

44. The communication of information on new research and development transpires at an exceedingly slow rate. Moreover, the media used for such communication reaches only a very restricted audience. Dissemination is greatly improved, consequently, when the mass media are brought into play as early as possible.

45. Few dissemination messages have relevance for all educational practitioners. Generally, practitioners believe that the information they most need is rarely available in a convenient, easily understood format. The targeting of specific messages for particular professional groups, in the style most appropriate for the intended audience, is therefore of considerable value.

46. In the present way of things, the incentive for information users to seek-out and acquire new knowledge

is relatively low. Hence, primary responsibilities for the diffusion of information must fall upon the sender rather than upon the receiver.

47. Whatever other dissemination media are deployed, it is essential that the communication process include planned interpersonal contact within the target audience if only because practitioners rely upon such word-of-mouth communication as their primary source of new information.

48. When practitioners consider potential modifications and improvements in their schools they depend most heavily upon materials and programs already in use elsewhere. As a result, the disseminator is well-advised to encourage information transfer from satisfied users to prospective adopters.

49. Educational practitioenrs tend to affiliate with one of five separate communication networks within the profession-at-large: elementary education, secondary education, vocational education, special education and higher education. Although these networks sometimes share overlapping interests, effective dissemination normally

must penetrate the particular network with which the potential user is associated.

50. It is a mistake to conceive of development, dissemination and utilization as separate entities. In a sense, the three are mutually interdependent, each influencing the others. Hence, the basic dissemination campaign should begin when development gets underway, and should also carry-over into the utilization phase.